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PROJECT:

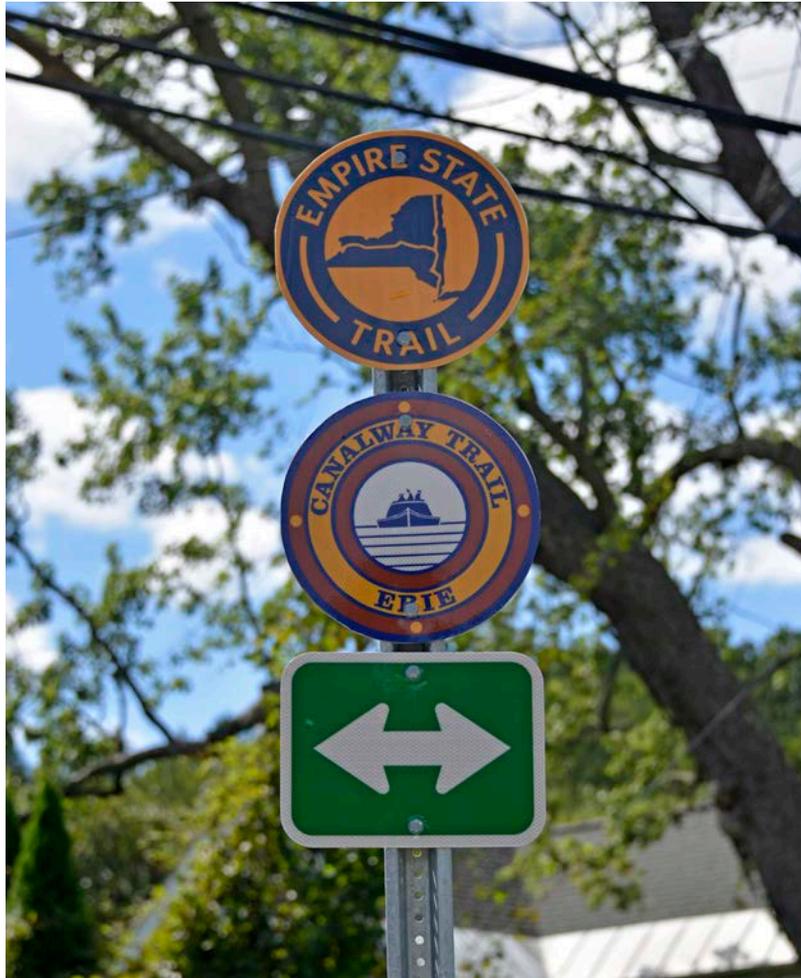
Schenectady Trails
Comprehensive
Wayfinding Plan

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PREPARED FOR:

Schenectady County
Metroplex Development Authority

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PRESENTED:

November 5, 2021



Schenectady Trails Comprehensive Wayfinding Plan

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INTRODUCTION

The launch of New York State’s Empire State Trail creates an exciting, valuable opportunity for Schenectady County to better showcase the rich history, unique sites, and many attractions along its trail segment, while also creating a safer and more enjoyable experience for visitors.

Developing a comprehensive wayfinding plan for Schenectady County’s trails, integrated with New York State’s Empire State Trail branding, will bolster both county and state efforts to enhance the trail experience. Better wayfinding will also drive visitors to local businesses, benefiting the Schenectady County economy.

While wayfinding can be completed in phases, it should be rooted in a comprehensive plan that identifies specific needs for trail etiquette, directional, wayfinding and interpretive signage, as well as digital (online map) and print (map/brochure) wayfinding elements.

To create this plan, we spent many hours biking the actual trail, observing trail visitors and traffic patterns. This “real time” experience informed recommendations about location, type and content of signs for each trail segment. Drawing on extensive experience developing maps for the Erie Canalway and Empire State Trail, we were also able to make recommendations that integrate with existing state efforts, to ensure efficiency and longevity of the signage investment.

This plan is designed to guide a coordinated and cost-effective effort that ensures all components maintain consistency while seamlessly integrating with the Discover Schenectady and Empire State Trail brands.

Types of signs were prioritized by wayfinding value, should the project be completed in stages. We recognize there may be additional factors or funding that could alter this order, so the plan was designed to maximize flexibility of implementation.

PLEASE REFER TO SIGNAGE LOCATION GUIDE FOR PLACEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS.



1

PRIORITY #1:**“Welcome to Schenectady County” Signs****LOGIC:**

Visitors should know they have crossed into Schenectady County before any additional signage is added. Currently, no signage exists at the east and west entry points. A “first handshake,” these two signs are critical in helping visitors establish their location, while also welcoming them and providing helpful information.

LOCATIONS:

1. **Western entrance to county;** opposite side of the trail from current “Welcome to Montgomery County” sign
2. **Eastern entrance to county** at Colonie line

CONTENT:

- “Welcome to Schenectady County”
- Co-branding of “Discovery Schenectady” and “Empire State Trail”
- QR code, driving to digital map, to show what is nearby



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PRIORITY #2:

Empire State Trail Etiquette Signs

LOGIC:

Given the uptick in trail usage during the pandemic, combined with increased efforts by both the county and state to promote the trail, it is critical that users are boldly and consistently reminded of the “rules of the road.”

TIER ONE LOCATIONS:

Every major entry point to trail (parking areas and major neighborhoods), including:

1. Pattersonville Trailhead Parking Area
2. Scrafford Lane/Rail overpass
3. Kiwanis International Parking Area
4. Erie Canal Lock 8
5. Mohawk Hudson Bikeway Parking
6. Gateway Landing Park
7. Washington Avenue and State Street (westbound)
8. River Street (Alco Trail entrance)
9. Trail entrance at Jay Street
10. Trail entrance at Nott Street
11. Parking Lot East of Balltown Road
12. River Road Parking Lot
13. Blatnick Park Parking Lot (two signs)
14. Lock 7 Road Parking Lot
15. Ferry Road Trail Entrance
16. Lions Park
17. Eastern Schenectady County Line

TIER TWO LOCATIONS:

Long stretches without much signage or high-usage areas, including:

- Washington Avenue at crosswalk
- Before rail underpass and Widewaters, along Thruway, heading east
- Between Kiwanis Park and Historic Lock 23
- Between Maxon Road and GE Circle
- Between Lock 7 and Lions Park

CONTENT:

Possible rules for inclusion:

- Dial 9-1-1 for any emergency
- Trail Is Open dawn to dusk
- No motorized vehicles (except approved mobility devices)
- No smoking
- Stay on trail—Respect private property
- Maintain a safe speed
- Keep right
- Pass on left
- Give audible warning when passing
- Stop at all intersections to check for oncoming traffic before crossing
- Pets MUST be kept on leash and in control at all times
- Dispose of trash and animal waste in designated bins or take it with you (or Clean up after your pet)
- Ride with traffic on road trail segments





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PRIORITY #3:

Kiosks for Downtown Schenectady

LOGIC:

As visitors are entering downtown Schenectady, a large sign showing the trail’s path through busier areas is an important safety element. Further, kiosk-style signs physically direct visitors to key attractions and amenities. Because of the concentration of activity, a large “entryway” sign can help guide visitors safety and efficiently to desired locations on and off the trail.

LOCATIONS:

1. **SUNY Schenectady**—across the street, before Washington Ave. (replace existing sign; one-sided)
2. **Corner of Union Street and Broadway**, near Centre Street Pub (double-sided). *NOTE: This is the recommended “gateway” to downtown from the trail. While Jay Street is the preferred location, because it connects directly to the city center and Jay Street pedestrian corridor, it is currently a one-way street, moving away from downtown.

NOTE: Discovery Schenectady will be placing new digital kiosks in several locations (Frog Alley; Proctors, Jay Street, SCCC, etc.)

CONTENT:

Each kiosk should include a map and listing of major categories. A QR code will allow smartphones to link to the digital wayfinding map to find a list of categories, where users can find specific businesses in each category.

In addition, a limited number of major attractions should also be included. Given the scale of the physical kiosk map, too much information diminishes effectiveness. The QR code format also makes it easy to update and for visitors to easily find what they are looking for.

Sample categories:

Parking, public restrooms, dining, shopping, lodging, Historic Stockade, Mohawk Harbor

Sample locations:

Rivers Casino, Amtrak Station, Ale Trail sites, hospital/urgent care, Central Park, etc.



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PRIORITY #4:

Directional Signage

LOGIC:

Main entry points to the trail, such as sanctioned parking areas, should have prominent signage directing visitors to major attractions and amenities in the vicinity, with mileage. These locations enjoy high traffic volume, are where visits often begin/end, and often have desired amenities.

Tier Two locations would be located at main junctions, guiding visitors to a smaller list of nearby attractions.

TIER ONE LOCATIONS:

1. Pattersonville Parking
2. Kiwanis International Parking
3. Lock 8
4. Lock 7
5. Lions Park

TIER TWO LOCATIONS:

1. Nott Street
2. Union Street, at Stockade Inn
3. River Road (bottom of hill, below GE Research Circle)
4. Jay Street (Little Italy)

CONTENT:

In addition to the locations listed below, a QR code on each sign will quickly connect visitors to the digital map, showing their specific location on the trail, with nearby attractions and amenities.

Potential locations to be listed, with relevant mileage:

- Buffalo (limited number of signs)
- Albany (limited number of signs)
- Amsterdam (west of Schenectady)
- Lock 8 (Schenectady and west)
- The Stockade (closer to Schenectady)
- Mohawk Harbor/Rivers Casino (All)
- Downtown Schenectady (All)
- Lock 7 (Schenectady and east)
- Blatnick Park (Schenectady and east)
- Lions Park (Schenectady and east)
- Hospital/urgent care locations added to signs with closest proximity:
 - Ellis Hospital
 - Mohawk Harbor—Ellis Urgent Care
 - Community Care Physicians Urgent Care—River Road Health Park
 - Surya Immediate Medical Care (Troy-Schenectady Road, near Lions Park)



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PRIORITY #5:

Interpretive Signs

LOGIC:

While etiquette and directional signage provide functional wayfinding, interpretive signage is equally important in establishing a sense of place for trail visitors. These signs should be positioned on the trail at significant locations, or more general topic signs can be used to break up long stretches of trail.

Tier Two locations include sites that are off the trail and also target signs that are worn or require updated branding/content.

National Register locations on or shortly off the trail should be a priority: www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/NY/Schenectady/state.html

TIER ONE LOCATIONS:

1. Widewaters, Rotterdam Junction (Leggerio Lane)
2. Old aqueduct at Kiwanis Park (feeds Mohawk from Plotter Kill); there is currently a historic marker
3. Lock 8—Canal history, enlarged Barge Canal
4. Enlarged double Lock 23, Old Erie Canal (National Register of Historic Places)
5. General Electric main plant (old HQ) (National Register of Historic Places) along I-890, where headquarters is visible
6. SUNY Schenectady, the former Hotel Van Curler, on path near kiosk, across the street from college main building

7. Stockade District (National Register of Historic Places. Described by the National Park Service as “the highest concentration of historic period homes in the country”)
 - One at west entry (near kiosk and Van Curler sign)
 - One at east entry (Union Street and Erie Boulevard right side of street in front of granite kiosk/bushes)
8. Nott Memorial (National Register of Historic Places)—position on trail, near soccer fields, facing Union College
9. Rexford Aqueduct Ruins (along trail, on Route 146 overpass)
10. GE Global Research (at top of hill, near main entrance on River Road)
11. Knolls Atomic Power Labs (at stop sign, near main entrance)
12. Lock 7
13. Niskayuna Rail Station, Lions Park (National Register of Historic Places); near actual station building

TIER TWO LOCATIONS:

1. Historic Lock 25 (Rotterdam)
2. Proctors Theater (National Register of Historic Places)
3. Schenectady City Hall and Post Office, Jay Street (National Register of Historic Places)

CONTENT:

Image-driven design, including historical information and any connection to current use.





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PRIORITY #6:
Additional Safety Signage

LOGIC:

Every trail segment has unique topography, intersections and historic locations that should include specific safety signage to warn and protect riders.

LOCATIONS:

Steep Grade Signs

(Use steep grade sign near rail pass at Widewaters as design template)

- Before and after hill into Mohawk River State Park
- Before and after hill near Niskayuna soccer fields and GE Research Center, near Mohawk River State Park (also include sharp turn arrow)
- Before and after hill at GE Research Center entrance
- Before and after hill behind Blatnick Park, River Road

Stop Signs

- Every intersection with a roadway

Light-up Crossing signs

(mirror the flashing sign on Aqueduct Road, near Rexford Bridge roundabout as design template)

- Maxon Road intersection, due to speed and size of vehicles (tractor trailer route)
- Seneca Street intersection, because nearby hill obstructs driver view of trail

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PRIORITY #7:
Jay Street/Little Italy Trail Entrance

OBSERVATIONS:

Current concrete barricade on Jay Street is a major eyesore, conveying an unsafe environment. It is not bicycle-friendly and upon approach, appears to indicate the trail is closed, with no clear signage.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Barricade should be replaced with neon pylons, like those at Maxon Rd. and Seneca St. trail intersections. These can be removed once the full street connection is complete.
- The current sign at the trail entrance is in the wrong location to benefit trail users. It should be moved or replaced with a kiosk or interpretive sign on the opposite side of the trail entrance.



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PRIORITY #8:
Selfie Spots

LOGIC:

Posting photos on social media is a popular and desired activity along trails. Creating “selfie spots” encourages visitors to stop in key locations with specific hashtags that connect images to county-run social media channels.

While there is obvious cross-promotional value with the Empire State Trail, the images also support wayfinding. By building a digital footprint of locations along the trail, they help potential and real-time visitors identify specific locations and show the full trail experience (pastoral vs. urban; riverfront vs. wooded areas).

Further, permission can be requested so the County can repurpose photos for trail promotion, website content, future social media posts and other marketing efforts.

LOCATIONS:

Locations directly on the trail:

1. Widewaters (replace current concrete barrier with railing for better view and add sign)
2. Lock 8
3. Lookout/Landing, past Lock 8
4. Gateway Landing Park
5. Dutch Reformed Church, Stockade
6. Mohawk Harbor
7. Aqueduct Park or Rexford Aqueduct Ruins
8. Top of hill opposite shelter, at the back of Blatnick Park, overlooking river
9. Lock 7
10. Lions Park

CONTENT:

- Consistent design, placed at convenient height for visitors to snap selfies.
- Branded with “Discover Schenectady,” including QR code that links directly to Discover Schenectady’s social media channels.





OFF THE TRAIL

Directional signage on the trail would drive visitors to important landmarks and attractions nearby, including approximate mileage.

Examples:

- Plotter Kill
- Via Aquarium
- Great Flats Nature Preserve
- Mabee Farm
- Schenectady County Historical Society

ALE TRAIL SIGNS

Each location should have a sign with the Ale Trail logo prominently displayed.

- Wolf Hollow Brewing Company
- Frog Alley
- Mad Jack Brewing/Historic Van Dyck
- Great Flats Brewing
- Druthers Brewing
- Back Barn Brewing (no directional sign)

ELKAY BOTTLE RE-FILLING STATIONS

Consistent branding and signage would identify key locations for water refilling stations.

- Lock 8
- Kiosk at Broadway
- Mohawk Harbor
- Blatnick Park
- Lock 7
- Lions Park

FAST FACTS/DID YOU KNOW

Comprised of local trivia or interesting facts that don't warrant a full interpretive sign, they help build interest about off-trail locations and illustrate the history, diversity and environmental features of Schenectady County.

Examples:

- History of railroad mileage markers/rail bridge history
- Perreca's—oven going for 100 years
- Originally land of the Mohawk Tribe of the Iroquois Nation
- Pat Riley, Hall of Fame basketball coach, was born and raised in Schenectady.
- General Electric plant has the Zip Code 12345.
- Schenectady introduced the first commercial television station with the creation of WRGB in 1940.

***Note:** We have compiled a more extensive list of both locations and topics, should you wish to pursue this additional level of signage.

EMPIRE STATE TRAIL PARKING SIGNS

Replicate sign at Patterson parking area for all Empire State Trail sanctioned parking to establish consistency across the trail segment.

“BIKE ROUTE” SIGNS

Because Schenectady County has an abundance of trail options, existing “Bike Route” signs should identify specific trail names. It will help ensure trail users are following their intended route.





EMPIRE STATE TRAIL MARKERS

There are some points on the trail that need EST markers for directional purposes. These have been noted in the Signage Location Guide. Additionally, EST trail markers should be located at every roadway intersection with the trail to ensure riders they are on the correct trail and to alert motorists of cyclists' presence and raise awareness. In our research and rides, we compiled a more comprehensive list, including signage inconsistencies along the trail. Should you wish to pursue this part of the plan, we can provide locations and recommended adjustments.

Recommended style guidelines:

Currently, the color and design of EST trail markers is inconsistent. Background color of directional arrows varies (green, brown and dark blue). Some locations have a trail marker, some do not. Some are round, others are square. When updated, they should follow the state/federal MUTCD guidelines.

- **Off road:** Circular trail marker; any arrows should have a dark blue background with white arrows
- **On road:** Square, green road sign with circular trail marker; white arrows on green background
- **Placement:** Empire State Trail marker should be positioned above the Erie Canalway Trail Marker

Background: ECT/EST Signage

- For decades, the NYS Canal Corp installed 18" round signs marking the Erie Canalway Trail route (on and off road); brown/white arrow signs were used to match the Canalway Trail logo.

- When the Empire State Trail was created, NYSDOT informed the trail team that state/federal MUTCD guidelines required that any trail sign installed on the shoulder of public roads must be the square version with the green background, using green/white arrow. The 18" Empire State Trail marker was acceptable for off-road sections.
- As a general rule, this has been followed: round EST signs on off-road trails, and square on on-road sections. In Schenectady, like other locations, a number of round on-road Canalway Trail signs were already posted, so round EST signs were installed to maintain consistency with those signs. These should be updated.

PROTECTING INVESTMENT/TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Upkeep by Schenectady County, Town of Rotterdam, Town of Niskayuna and the city of Schenectady is vital to ensure a consistent trail user experience and protect the investment in new signage. Recommended actions include:

- Regular foliage trimming to keep trail markers and other signage visible
- Monitoring for and cleaning of graffiti on signs
- Repainting chipping pylons and gates
- Work with "Friends of Mohawk Hudson Bike Hike Trail" ambassadors to continue monitoring trail, communicating issues and handing out business cards that promote the digital map, once created



Today, an essential companion to wayfinding signage is a real-time, interactive map, designed for mobile phone use. We recommend a map be designed specifically for the trail segment and live on the Discover Schenectady website.

The map currently under development by Discover Schenectady will serve as a “comprehensive directory” of everything available to all visitors. The trail map would complement these efforts and could be offered to visitors seeking more robust travel information, off the trail.

The Visually-Driven Digital Wayfinding Map would be developed specifically for trail users, to assist at every stage of their journey:

- 1. Planning:** Before they arrive, determining which section(s) of the trail to cover, knowing distance, terrain, etc., and connections with nearby, off-trail destinations.
- 2. Arrival:** Assisting the rider in getting to the best location to begin their journey (parking; nearby highway, etc.).
- 3. Throughout:** Using geo-targeting, allowing visitors to see their exact location, gauge the distance/time it will take to reach destinations, and follow more specific wayfinding direction that augments what they see on the trail.

DIGITAL MAP DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

For efficiency and ease of use, we recommend using Google Maps as the map base. It enjoys a high level of user familiarity and offers an existing package of robust features. A custom map should then be designed that operates at two levels:

- 1. TRAIL SECTIONS:** Separating the map into zones, this higher map level will provide an overview of each trail section, including whether it is more rural/natural; urban; etc.

Zones may include:

- Rotterdam to SCCC
- Downtown Schenectady
- The Stockade
- Mohawk Harbor/Glenville Loop
- Niskayuna/Mohawk River

- 2. SPECIFIC WAYFINDING:** The map should also operate as an interactive wayfinding map. By echoing and augmenting key signage and elements along the trail, it can provide constant direction to riders. Amenities, such as water fountains and restrooms, as well as bike shops and food, will be included.



ADDITIONAL MAP ELEMENTS, continued**QR CODES**

- QR codes will be created to drive users to the online map.
- When added to physical trail signs, kiosks and the recommended physical map, QR codes instantly enhance the wayfinding experience with real-time information and solutions during the visitor trip on the trail. They can be offered in two ways:
 1. **Geotargeting:** By placing QR codes on the on-trail signage, the map would instantly know a visitor's location (without requesting their GPS). Multiple codes on a specific sign could point them in various directions. For example, a code could say "Find a Nearby Brewery" and the map would pull up their location (at the sign), displaying all of the breweries nearby and/or route them directly to the nearest one.
 2. **Categories:** Alternately, a single (larger) QR code could bring up a list of key selections (e.g. "Breweries", "Restaurants", "Parking", etc.). From there, the user could select the category of interest, with the site still being aware of their location and routing them accordingly. This approach broadens visitors' exposure to potential opportunities they may not be considering.
- **IMPORTANT:** Because QR codes point to specific URLs, a given QR code's functionality could be changed at a future time, without having to replace the code itself on the sign, saving time and money.

PHOTOGRAPHY

- The map should be image driven, so it shows the rider what the trail looks like—both in advance as well as in real time.
- Similar to the Erie Canalway map design (<https://nycanalmap.com/>), the "drawer feature" should include photography of key features and attractions on that part of the trail.
- These images become visual markers that can be used to plan a trip and gauge location while riding.
- While specific photos should be captured at shoots, using a professional photographer, attractions such as restaurants or lodging can supply photos that can be easily uploaded to fill out the map.

MAP MANAGEMENT

- Once the map is developed, Schenectady County would enjoy complete management of all points on the map.
- This includes adding new points of interest, temporarily opening seasonal venues, removing closed shops or restaurants, or changing them should they become something new.
- The map management provides an additional level of wayfinding, by allowing the map manager to specify the exact location of where the map point should appear.
- Typically, Google adds its marker to the center of a location, when pointing visitors to a parking area may be preferred. This level of granular control of map markers significantly enhances the user experience.



ADDITIONAL MAP ELEMENTS, continued

DATA GATHERING CAPABILITY

- The digital map system would automatically gather every interaction and store it for future analysis.
- Questions such as: “How many people used that QR code?” or “How many visitors clicked on Proctors Theatre on the map?” could easily be answered, with robust data available for presentations or grant requests.
- Regular reporting each season could inform continual improvement to optimize the trail experience.

EMPIRE STATE TRAIL LINK

- Ultimately, the Visually-Driven Wayfinding Map can be linked to the Empire State Trail website and map, providing a richer wayfinding experience for visitors considering the Schenectady portion of the trail.



A physical, printed map of the Schenectady segment of the Empire State Trail is an essential component in a comprehensive wayfinding plan. While many visitors today rely on smartphone technology for real-time navigation, the phone or even computer screen may not satisfy all wayfinding needs.

From serious cyclists to casual day visitors, a physical companion map is a valuable resource for trip planning, on-the-trail troubleshooting and as a visual “snapshot” in reference to the surrounding areas. Many visitors use information on a physical map to research further online.

MAP DESIGN

As its name indicates, the printed map should be developed as a companion to the digital version, which offers more capacity for detail and updates. Mirroring the design and branding of both the digital map and kiosk maps, it would showcase the actual trail segment, highlighting towns, key attractions, and amenities, similar to a traditional map.

However, it would also include the same main categories that appear on the digital map. Using consistent QR codes, it would allow the reader instant access to more information online.

Just like the digital map, consistent co-branding with Empire State Trail visually signals that Schenectady is part of a larger trail effort in New York. Because Schenectady will be one of the earlier communities creating this level of trail wayfinding, the region will benefit from supplying more extensive information to visitors.

INTRODUCING THE TRAIL

Because both the Schenectady segment and the full Empire State Trail are still new, the physical map also plays a crucial role in introducing the trail to potential users. It makes accessing the trail simple for those who may not necessarily be seeking its adventures.

A printed map should include beautiful images that capture the range of scenery, activities, and attractions along the trail. This serves a more intrinsic wayfinding role—helping visitors envision themselves using the trail.

From Schenectady’s Amtrak station to a large conference at Mohawk Harbor, this piece can easily be used in concert with other marketing materials. We strongly recommend the map be distributed further, via rack holders across the Capital Region and relevant Thruway rest areas.

SIZE AND FORMAT

The general size of this piece should be approximately 24”x 9” and would accordion fold into six 4” wide by 17” tall panels and then fold in half to 4” x 9” to allow for distribution in rack brochure holders.



PHOTOGRAPHY

A critical supporting element to both the online and printed map is the procurement of photography. Planned, professional images will provide the appropriate visual cues for trail users to guide them through their travels and to the services, amenities and attractions they seek.

CARTOGRAPHY

While the online version of the map will be generated through Google Maps, that format is not usable in print. For this reason, it will be necessary to create a vector-illustrated map that will be used as artwork on the kiosks and in the printed wayfinding map.





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